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The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Dear friends, sisters and brothers,

1. What do we mean?

The 10th assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, Korea, in November 2013, called on you and all people of good will to engage in transformative action. In this sense the 10th Assembly continued the reflection and prayers of the 9th Assembly which was hosted here in Latin America, in Porto Alegre, 2006: “God in your grace, transform the world!” Then, at the 10th Assembly, we said something more. The message, reflecting on the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace,” concluded with the succinct and clear call: “Join us in a pilgrimage of justice and peace!”

What does it mean that the World Council of Churches is now inviting all people of good will to join a pilgrimage of justice and peace?

The WCC has raised, and indeed every day continues to raise, the most burning issues before the world and the churches during the last years and decades. They have been addressed through studies, publications, and through programmes like the Programme to Combat Racism or the human rights

initiative in Latin America during the time of the military dictatorships. Long-term studies on the unity of the church and on mission were undertaken that led to widely shared and recognized documents and interactions. Processes like the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, and the Decade to Overcome Violence mobilized member churches and ecumenical groups. The WCC engages in advocacy and campaigns in the context of HIV and AIDS, climate change, economic and social justice, peace in the Middle East, for disarmament and bans of nuclear weapons and of nuclear power. Another important dimension of the work has been the promotion of inter-faith dialogue and cooperation, even when it was not as urgent as it is today in the face of violence allegedly in the name of religion.

Let me present three reasons that motivated delegates of the 10th WCC Assembly at Busan in 2013 to call for a pilgrimage of justice and peace as the overarching programme emphasis of the WCC:

1. As I was listing highlights of the work of the WCC in the past, some will have remembered and been proud of some of our achievements. Only in the last years, for instance, could we hand over to the Brazilian government files concerning human rights violations by the Brazilian military. There shall be no impunity for such horrendous human rights violations. For some other listeners, though, it might sound like a long shopping list. These are surely all issues of utmost importance; however, what is it that binds them together as key concerns of Christian churches? At times those focusing on church unity, and those who focus on mission, or public witness and advocacy, seem to behave as though they exist in separated and even competitive camps. The contemporary

context does not allow us the luxury to stay in our individual camps, churches or communities. We need to move out of them, crossing boundaries, seeking each other, strengthening relationships and sharing our deepest motivations and faith commitments along the way. The WCC Assembly called upon Christians and churches of different traditions not only to stay together, but to move together.

2. We need to recover in new ways the meaning of the one ecumenical movement in today's world. A movement must have a profile and direction. The ecumenical movement has always aspired for a better understanding of our challenges as one humanity. It was led by the conviction that the churches need to respond to them in unity, clearly focusing on justice and peace as the guiding values and signs of God's reign to come. We ask together, "What does it mean today to move forward together as Christian churches into a common future for the human family?"

3. This broader horizon of the future of one human family requires a far less institutional and more open approach beyond the existing membership of the WCC. We need to be together on the way with the Roman Catholic Church and also with the growing communities of Evangelical, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, despite all organizational differences. It seems easy to find reasons for division. It is obviously more difficult, but also entirely necessary, to find ways to overcome them. In the world today, it is imperative that we find ways to go even beyond Christianity, but to cooperate with all people of good will.

The reality is that humanity is in many ways deeply divided – by lack of justice and peace. This also affects the churches. Life is being threatened as a consequence of profound injustice and inequality, of violence and war, and the destruction of the very basis of life on our planet. The future of humanity and the whole creation requires and deserves that we leave our divisions and tensions behind. Only together can we become credible witnesses for the good news of the gospel and overcome boundaries that set us apart. There is only one common future for humanity, not many and not just mine.

This situation tells us that we remain fixed in former institutional methodologies, settings and priorities. Acting this way, we risk living as mere captives of our own past, even if it was to some extent successful. We need to go into the future open to new challenges and new partnerships and continue to overcome prejudice and enmity, embracing our God-given diversity. We need to go out knowing that we have an important contribution to make; knowing, too, that we also need the efforts of many others to arrive at solutions for the burning problems of humanity. This implies a certain humility in how we address others and cooperate with them.

Argentina has been blessed with some very effective ambassadors. For us in the ecumenical movement, I can recall among the many significant persons who have contributed so much the late José Miguez-Bonino. He had a special influence on my personal ecumenical pilgrimage as he inspired me to see new ways of bringing the integrity of the one ecumenical movement forward through a focus on mutual accountability in our approach. In my own understanding, this describes an attitude, an approach we need in everything we do in the ecumenical movement. As we share with one another the different church traditions and confessions, we should also share a deeper and more critical analysis of our own contexts and of being one in our mutual

accountability to what the Spirit teaches us on our way. He also inspired many with his characteristic emphases on contextual analysis, engaged faith and political involvement in the perspective of liberation theology. This continues to be a relevant and even necessary entry point to our joint efforts, when we name them a pilgrimage of justice and peace.

Worldwide, however, the most outstanding Argentinian ambassador today is a person you all know better than many of us do. Surely, I think of Pope Francis. When he speaks about the economy, climate change and his deep love for the poor, people can still see and hear the former Archbishop of Buenos Aires and his concern for the lives of people in this country. This is also true for the relationships with other churches and faith communities. When we met, he strongly affirmed the WCC's approach to the pilgrimage of justice and peace as completely congruent to his own understanding of the mission of the Church today.

Pope Francis translates the old Roman title of the *pontifex maximus* in effective ways of bridge building to promote unity among Christians, and justice and peace for one human family. I see many signs of this. Pope Francis opened new horizons for common witness and cooperation for the future of creation and humanity with his encyclical *Laudato si'*. Just recently he called for a World Day of Prayer for the Care for Creation on 1 September. He urged the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to coordinate cooperation with the World Council of Churches in this regard. While some of the traditional pathways to Christian unity through bilateral theological dialogues are obviously confronted with new difficulties, other doors are opening; we need to seize these opportunities in the best possible ways, moving forward together. I believe that these initiatives are indeed approaches congruent to

the call of the 10th Assembly of the WCC to all people of good will to join a pilgrimage of justice and peace.

In summary of my introductory remarks and as a first answer to the question of why the WCC is calling for a pilgrimage of justice and peace, I would like to say that the pilgrimage of justice and peace is a spiritually grounded transformative journey. It defines and articulates in a new way the quality of the ecumenical movement, the interrelatedness of its different dimensions, the new partnerships that need to be formed and its goal. Speaking of a pilgrimage that combines spiritual dimensions of prayer and worship and practical action for justice and peace, we are reminded that Christian life and identity are part of something greater than ourselves, something which binds us together in solidarity with each other as an expression of God's grace and love. Focusing on justice and peace, we affirm the values that guide us on the way of transformation, as signs of God's reign to come.

Together on a pilgrimage

To explain better what the pilgrimage of justice and peace entails, we need to address the different meanings of pilgrimage and say more about justice and peace as characteristics of the journey.

Pilgrimage is a well-known practice and metaphor for Christian life, as also in other religions. The Bible almost from the beginning tells the story of Abraham as a story of pilgrimage. It starts with the call and initiative from God to move on. It is indeed both the call and the willingness to move on, to leave something behind and the journey to a new place which will be sanctified by the presence of God. The story of Jesus moves through his pilgrimage up to Jerusalem and culminates there with the cross and resurrection. The

movement is transformed into a pilgrimage into the world that all disciples of Jesus will undertake, spreading the good news of justice for the poor and peace for all people. The pilgrimage emphasizes the fellowship of those together on the way, and hence the unity of the disciples and churches. It has the potential to revitalize the emphasis of being church together for the world, a calling to be served by the church and for the world to rediscover faith in God as creator and saviour.

The motif of the pilgrimage calls to mind both the experience of a transformative journey and also the search for a dwelling place and a special experience of God's healing and reconciling presence. The two meanings of pilgrimage as a way of transformation and a journey to a holy place are always interconnected in some way, even though the transformative aspect of it too often is overlooked and must be recovered. We need to be reminded that the final goal of God's pilgrimage with the world is not a particular holy place, but the renewal of all life. To keep these dimensions in mind is essential for the metaphorical use of the term as a shared faith journey with all who are ready to respond to the most urgent challenges with which humanity is confronted.

There is also another dimension to the pilgrimage that makes it both existentially appealing and possible to use as a theme and direction for the work of the WCC, an organization established precisely for cooperation and search for unity among those who are diverse. The motif of the pilgrimage points toward openness to change and to moving forward into the unknown. It points consistently to the future. It brings us away from a focus on our historical differences and divisions, while the trajectory of the journey entails the awareness of history and tradition. It is not a way to escape or to run away but to identify the traces of God's own pilgrimage of justice and peace that lead to the renewal of creation and life in fullness and to follow them. The way

itself is anamnestic. It carries with it the memory of past events to make their meaning manifest in the context of contemporary challenges, making one's way towards the future. The pilgrimage connects church and world in a dynamic way.

However, we ought not forget the critical voices that point to difficult aspects of the term. The exclusive emphasis on the holy place and the commercialization of possible benefits for the pilgrim has been a reason for Martin Luther's harsh critique of pilgrimage. What he saw in his time contradicted his emphasis on justification by grace alone. There are other reservations against the term because pilgrimages to Jerusalem eventually degenerated into crusades, and, in the search for freedom of religion, so called "pilgrim fathers" took the land – and those who followed them too often took the lives of first nation people.

Positively speaking, the motif of the pilgrimage resonates with other well-known experiences and events in recent history. We remember, for instance, the marches of the civil rights movements or the mass manifestations against nuclear weapons. We see a glimpse of this again in on-going pilgrimages for climate justice. Many different people, groups, congregations, dioceses and ecumenical organizations across denominational boundaries begin to move towards Paris where the next Climate Change Conference of the United Nations will take place in December. They organize many events at the different stations of their pilgrimage. This happens in many of the European countries, but also in other regions. The ACT Alliance is organizing a major event in Nairobi with Desmond Tutu and encouraging action in many other countries of Africa and Asia.

Pilgrimage *of* Justice and Peace

Another critical point for the understanding of the pilgrimage of justice and peace is the choice of the little word “of”, and not “for” or “towards”, justice and peace by the 10th Assembly. Grammar is a significant tool in analysing what is meant. The genitive “of justice and peace” is in my understanding a qualifying genitive, which is quite usual in the English language. Justice and peace must qualify what we are doing on our common journey, and even the way we chose to go.

But this qualification refers also to the past, to the prophets of the Bible, the teaching and healing of Jesus, the vision of the New Creation, the struggles of the poor and marginalized in history and the ways in which the ecumenical movement addressed rampant injustice and worked for peace: How to overcome, end and prevent war and armed conflicts, how to establish social, political and cultural relationships based on human rights, how to overcome structural injustice and the impoverishment of far too many people? These concerns are brought into one discourse. The relationship among them needs to be explored and be brought to bear on our actions. We are in this process in a discussion of the relationship of just-peace and peace-with-justice and how all of this relates to the search for the unity of the church.

In a lecture presented in 1983 in San Francisco, José Miguez Bonino reminded us that unity can be oppressive and exclude. Instead, he wanted to see

> “The unity that is created among Christians and non-Christians engaged in a common task in the world…There - in the struggle for human rights, for social transformation, for political participation - Christians of different confessions participate with women and men of different ideologies, without claiming any special privilege, without hiding or watering down their own Christian convictions, and discover both their

> common humanity and their Christian identity as an unexpected gift. When the Church engages herself in this mission, she finds unity in her struggle for liberation and that unity strengthens and deepens her commitment to freedom. Such unity and such liberation, we claim, the Church can find today when she identifies with her Lord by committing herself to and participating with the poor in their own struggle for a new day for the whole of humankind."

He had a vision of the approach that we try to foster today through the pilgrimage of justice and peace. With his work on a vital and coherent theology of the ecumenical movement, Miguez proposed ways to embrace differences and diversity as gifts of God and not to seek a uniform answer. It has become urgent to find methods of expressing consensus in a fellowship that is diversified and cannot be confused with cheap and false compromise at the expense of justice. All this leads to a dynamic understanding of unity on the way of justice and peace.

The prophetic witness that calls for change requires the accompaniment of the people on their exodus of slavery and a sense of mutual accountability among those together on the way. As qualities of the way, justice and peace call for accountability towards each other, to all life. In all this we are accountable ultimately to God. The God of life leads us in the sharing of responsibility for the way we chose and the goal we seek.

The pilgrimage of justice and peace reminds us that there is no way to separate the problems of the world from our faith. The conflicts, the violence, the injustice, the poverty and the abuse of nature and of women and children cannot be ignored by any person who puts his or her faith in the Triune God of life and believes that justice and peace is the will of God, that it is possible and will prevail.

A call to hope that is real

The way we address the challenges of today has to be based on both faith as the awareness of the graceful presence of God and also faith as the expression of hope and commitment. We humbly offer our contributions to the reality that cries out for transformation and hope. Being on the way, we are not focusing on ourselves, our own internal reflections and problems; instead, we look at the world together from the perspective of the cross of Christ and in the way Christ showed the highest commitment of solidarity to the world, both fallen humanity and the whole of creation. With the pilgrimage we are moving into this reality, we are searching for a closeness to life that corrects our perceptions and prejudice and opens new horizons.

Such a caring relationship to the world and accompaniment of others combines a critical analysis of the reality, the commitment and practice of solidarity with fellow human beings in their needs and for their rights, and a plan of action. Such closeness to life makes it impossible to address issues of injustice or conflict only in general terms. The relationship between church and politics cannot be solved by speaking about principles, abstract questions and generalities. The pilgrim is confronted with the realities of life in a given context. The pilgrim also cannot pretend to jump to a goal neglecting the concrete place and the journey that is still to be undertaken toward the next station on the way to the goal. But at the same time, the pilgrim must anticipate the goal of the journey.

Climate Change and the path of Just Peace

This year, the WCC is concentrating on the pilgrimage of justice and peace as it pertains to climate justice. The way towards the UN conference on climate change later this year in Paris is critical for decisive action to address global warming and its consequences. The fossil fuel industry and some other

powerful interests want us to be confused, and they constantly deny that the burning of fossil fuel and high energy consumption especially by the highly industrialized societies are the major reasons for rising global average temperatures, for more violent weather events, and the melting of glaciers and ice-caps raising the sea level even more in addition to the effect of warmer ocean waters that expand.

I am very grateful that I can share with you that we see a new level of cooperation among Christian leaders and churches and their deep commitment to push for change and real action on the root causes of climate change.

I was in Rome shortly before the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'* was launched, and Pope Francis committed the Roman Catholic Church to address the causes and consequences of climate justice together with all Christian churches and people of other faith communities. There in Rome as he did last year in New York, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, addressed religious leaders, sharing with us that he knows just how little progress there actually has been in the negotiations for the climate conference. He told us that the faith and ethical convictions of the religions are needed to make the movement for climate justice so strong that politics will have to follow.

The world is divided. Yes, but we also now see a momentum toward consensus among peoples of faith such as we have hardly ever seen before, uniting to answer the call to common action and responsibility in facing climate change. It is up to us – to me, to you, to us all.

"Get up and walk!" is the theme of the ecumenical pilgrimage for climate justice that I have already mentioned. We call on the churches, we call on you

to join this path in the confidence that it will succeed, that with your commitment you will see results. This year is a decisive year.

Another dimension of the pilgrimage that is becoming increasingly important is the work for reconciliation and just peace. These are, of course, vital issues here in Latin America. Impunity for the crimes committed during the time of the military dictatorships and the need for truth and reconciliation are still vital matters here in Argentina and to a different degree in both Brazil and Chile, two of the countries I will be visiting. I will also visit Colombia where peace is such an urgent issue for the lives and future of millions of people.

Worldwide interreligious relations and interreligious cooperation for justice and peace also become more and more important. Together we have to resist the misuse of religion to justify discrimination and violence. The WCC is involved in some very specific projects of interreligious cooperation, such as the development of an early warning system about violence and terror in Nigeria, together with Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan. In Egypt we are supporting cooperation between Christians and Muslims on youth unemployment as a means to prevent violence. The Executive Committee of the WCC has proposed that in 2016 our common endeavours for a just peace should be focussed on the situation in the Middle East and especially on Israel and Palestine.

We all know from our experience of the last decades that we need to create alternative spaces for encounter and reconciliation, in which peace and justice can grow and flourish, instead of building walls of separation. Wherever life is threatened, we need to find paths towards each other and spaces to encounter each other that point to the promise of God’s justice and peace. We need to create spaces in which life for all people and creation can prosper, places of sharing, of dialogue, of reconciliation.

Three dimensions of Christian faith exposed in the pilgrimage of justice and peace

The pilgrimage of justice and peace has soteriological, eschatological and diaconal dimensions.

When we encounter the specific context of our individual places and countries and look at the challenges through the eyes of our faith, we discern the very specific ways in which Jesus is present among those who suffer and the ways that the Holy Spirit sustains life and brings about change. The soteriological situation of every context is different, yet we know and see that our faith connects us with more than ourselves alone. It gives us hope and motivates us, knowing as we do that God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the creator, redeemer and life-giver, wills to renew relationships and opens the way of new life. Our faith in the Triune God forms our spirituality and lets us partake through Baptism and the Eucharist in the new reality God brings about.

The pilgrimage of justice and peace also has an eschatological dimension that fosters our believe that this world can change towards justice and peace and fullness of life in the presence of God. This change was enacted with the incarnation, the death and resurrection of Christ, and we are sustained on our way by the power of the Holy Spirit. All this together is a source of hope that can motivate us on our way. Seen in the perspective of the cross of Jesus Christ, there is no tragedy, no sin, no injustice nor loneliness, no feeling of being forsaken that cannot be changed by God into a new reality of hope. The cross is the sign of God’s love for humankind. We are moving forward with hope in all that God can bring about and, therefore, we support the struggles of the poor, the mission of peacemakers and all who are working to protect creation.

Another side of such action is the diaconal dimension of the pilgrimage. The people on the way will look for those who need comfort and support in their struggle for life. This is the dimension of deep solidarity with the world and all life on earth. It is vital for us today to cherish the deep spiritual truth that we belong together as one human family and that we are part of the entire web of life. The recognition of our interrelatedness is the starting point of a shared journey of transformation. It is the beginning of the mutual trust and solidarity needed to transform an ambivalent reality.

Conclusion: Let us move together!

The Church needs to see that, in the Holy Spirit, we are where Christ is present. The poor at the margins of society, those who have lost loved ones because of violence and war, whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed and who yearn for peace, those who long for meaning and hope, those who struggle with health or the basic human relationships, those who are captive in the circles of greed, and also those who live lives full of meaning – all of these are found in the fellowship of the Church and are very near to us everywhere.

We see these realities around and among us, in all contexts and continents. As I now visit your country Argentina and go on to visit Brazil, Chile and Columbia, I will witness in your presence these many dimensions of human life and challenges us and our brothers and sisters. I am also here to see and hear how you are being Church here, with your many challenges but also with your many strengths through which you have made contributions in the past and present to the ecumenical move forward – the faith journey of justice and peace.

The Church cannot just remain with the status quo. Therefore we say to one another, “Join the pilgrimage of justice and peace! Stand up for the creation

that is threatened, for justice and peace, so that people may gain hope so that life will flourish. Resist the powers that lead us only deeper into injustice, violence and the destruction of our livelihoods.” On our way together, let us not give up after the first setbacks and disappointments, but let us set off again, seeking God’s presence each day in prayer, looking for companions for life.

The Church hopes and prays every day that the kingdom of God may come. Therefore, there is never an excuse for sitting down and being satisfied with, or simply complaining about, how things are. No: We continue to pray for, and contribute to, the transformation of this world, according to the values of the kingdom of God.

In doing so, we pray in the words of both themes of the last two WCC Assemblies: “God in your grace, transform the world!”, and “God of life, lead us to justice and peace!”

So, let us join together in a pilgrimage of justice and peace!